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COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS FOR AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS
CATF/CLF UNDERGO A TRANSFORMATION

by
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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS FOR AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS: CATF/CLF UNDERGO A TRANSFORMATION

Amphibious flexibility is the greatest strategic asset that a sea power possesses.

B. H. Liddell Hart

The unrelenting progress of mankind causes continual change in the weapons; and with that must come continual change in the method of fighting.

Alfred Thayer Mahan

The U.S. Navy (USN) is the lead agent for Joint Publication (JP) 3-02, *Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations*¹. Consistent with the long standing relationship with the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), the two services worked together to develop a consensus position on what was an appropriate array of command relationships for amphibious operations. Both Services sought to make doctrinal modifications in order to reflect the "impacts of joint operations and doctrine, USMC component, routine forward presence, diverse threats, and Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) deployment options."² The consensus position calls for an expansion of the available command authority to reflect a preference for a support relationship, but to provide the Joint Force Commander (JFC) with the latitude to employ an operational control (OPCON) or a tactical control (TACON) option as appropriate.³ Changing the traditional command relationship for amphibious operations is a topic that evokes a lot of emotional debate within the seafaring services. The intent of this paper is not to add fuel to the embers still glowing from that settled debate. Rather, this paper will look at how this new doctrine will enhance the warfighting capability of the naval services to ease the concerns of those that question the wisdom of this change.

The Navy/Marine Corps team provides the JFC with a very potent and flexible capability – amphibious operations. With the fall of the "Iron Curtain," these two services continue to transform a force previously focused on the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's flanks, to an even more efficient merger of naval advantages with a range of amphibious force employment options. In adopting a doctrinal change to the command authority options, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) have acknowledged that joint doctrine has shifted responsibility to the JFC to synchronize forces and to harmonize the operational functions across the entire battlespace. Unity of effort, the cornerstone of amphibious operations, no longer translates to unity of command by a naval commander.

Whoever can make and implement his decisions consistently faster gains a tremendous, often decisive advantage. Decision making thus becomes a time- competitive process, and timeliness of decisions become essential to generating tempo.

FMFM 1, *Warfighting*

The method of command for any 21st century naval operating force will continue to be an essential component of that force's effectiveness. Advances in technology ⁴ are enabling the amphibious force to have more speed, flexibility and to add depth to the battlespace. Just as important, netcentric warfare will enable the rapid distribution of tactical and operational data across all the functional areas. The speed in fusing and processing data will reduce decision time and permit the decisive application of military capability at the right place and the appropriate time. Command relationship options must provide sufficient flexibility to the JFC for employment of amphibious forces either as a stand-alone entity or as a complementary part of a larger force. This ability to "plug and play" naval force is essential

in capturing the benefits of this operational capability without saddling the JFC with too much overhead in command and control constraints.

Before analyzing the advantages of expanding the command options, it is important to outline the consensus positions and recommendations for doctrinal changes. Once that baseline has been established, an examination of the environment and the advantages of amphibious operations to that environment are relevant to develop a common framework.

Naval Consensus Positions

The seas are no longer a self-contained battlefield. Today they are a medium from which warfare is conducted. The oceans of the world are the base of operations from which navies project power onto land and targets. The mission of protecting sea lanes continues in being, but the Navy's central missions have become to maximize its ability to project power from over the land and prevent the enemy from doing the same.

Timothy Shea
Project Poseidon

Soon after JP 3-02 was approved on, 8 October 1992, the USMC sought a revision to better reflect joint doctrine and USMC component status.⁵ JP 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces*, directs that only the JFC can assign a service component OPCON to another service component.⁶ The USMC sought to revise JP 3-02 in order to employ the sea as maneuver space without the requirement to be OPCON to the Naval Component Commander.⁷ In January 2000, the CNO and the CMC directed a one-year evaluation be conducted to determine what changes to doctrine were needed. This evaluation of command relationships is the reason for the delay in the approval and publishing of the revision to JP 3-02.⁸ The service chiefs placed two constraints on the latitude of the study. First, the new position had to retain the historical close relationship of the Navy/Marine Corps team. Second, the command relationship had to enhance the JFC's ability to employ naval forces across the full

spectrum of military operations.⁹

The centerpiece of the one-year evaluation was the Sea II Seminar War Game supported by the Naval War College. The scope of the war game was to provide an opportunity to examine command relationships at the Amphibious Group/ Marine Expeditionary Brigade level and the numbered fleet level/Marine Expeditionary Force level.¹⁰ Blending the results of the war game and their personal experiences, senior flag and general officers¹¹ developed and forwarded recommendations for consensus positions. Recently, the CNO and the CMC published their approval to the consensus positions reached during the Sea II War Game.¹² One of the most significant changes is that Commander, Amphibious Task Force (CATF)/Commander, Landing Force (CLF) are now descriptive doctrinal terms and not descriptive titles. The terms do not imply a command relationship; rather CATF/CLF are incorporated within the language of the new doctrine as a means to help clarify the duties and responsibilities of the individual commanders.¹³ To simplify the discussion on command relationships, future reference in this paper to the CATF will imply the commander of the amphibious naval force and CLF will be the term associated with the landing force commander that could be either a Marine or an Army commander. The transformation of CATF/CLF to descriptive terms is a major change in the interrelationship of command of naval and landing forces. The current JP 3-02 directs: "CATF, a Navy Officer, is responsible for the operation and, except during the planning phase, exercises that degree of authority over the entire force as necessary to ensure success of the operation."¹⁴ This change unlinks the traditional responsibility for success of an operation from the CATF and permits the JFC to determine if that responsibility will be vested in a single commander

or shifted to various commanders based on time or events. Under the consensus position, the relationship between CATF and CLF will be specified in the Initiating Order and/or the Establishing Directive and not subject of doctrinal definitions.¹⁵

The service chiefs also came to the consensus position that the support relationship would be the preferred method of command, but that the JFC had the doctrinal latitude to utilize an OPCON or TACON option when desired.¹⁶ The determination of who would be the supported commander would rely on at least the following factors: mission, threat, type, phase and duration of the operation, command and control capabilities, battlespace assignment and the recommendations from the subordinate commanders.¹⁷

Having looked at the recommended changes to doctrine, we need to now take a look at the environment that shapes future military requirements.

Environment

Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided- except in the rarest of cases- either by what your army can do against the enemy's territory and national life or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do.

Sir Julian Corbett

Any change in the conduct and control of military operations requires an analysis of the operating environment. As the world's sole super power, the United States has witnessed a dramatic increase in her responsibilities and commitments throughout the world. It is reasonable to assume that the U.S. military will continue to play an ever-increasing role in enabling the accomplishment of the nation's goals and objectives. As globalization continues to strengthen economic ties and relationships between countries, it is likely that access to a crisis area will be an obstacle to the United States' ability to influence events and

project power across the globe. Conducting military operations from the sea does not require land-based infrastructure or access from countries within the area of operations.

Amphibious operations provide the JFC with the ability to seize terrain, deny area to the enemy, enable future operations and to force the concentration or dispersion of enemy forces. Amphibious operations can serve as an economy of force measure with surprise, mobility and mass making up for the shortfall in force ratios. Amphibious forces take advantage of space as they concentrate at a decisive point or at a position of enemy vulnerability. Time can also be to the benefit of the amphibious force. This force can choose when to execute and at what depth in the battlespace to attack. The depth and location of the attack generates time as the enemy redeploys or reorients his forces to address the new threat. In today's joint environment, amphibious operations leverage new and emerging technology to extend the depth of the battlespace, and can employ a smaller force at decisive points, critical vulnerabilities or centers of gravity. Advances in the speed and range of ship to shore lift have provided more maneuvering room for the amphibious task force (ATF). This maneuvering room translates into enhanced force protection, flexibility and an increased ability to target the adversary's critical vulnerabilities.

History chronicles the impact of amphibious operations during World War II when the CATF/CLF relationship was codified in victory. However, the broader range of missions, the reliance on joint forces and the ability to shape and influence such a large area of operations suggest the command relationship must adapt to the needs of the new environment.

Does the CATF/CLF Command Relationship Need To Change?

When the traditional CATF/CLF relationship of World War II was developed, the

amphibious task force was applied against naval objectives and the CATF was assigned control of the land/sea/airspace. The task of coordinating and sequencing the force and the logistical requirements to ensure mission success was an extremely complex undertaking. The Navy had depth in numbers of trained and experienced commanders who could assume the role as CATF and therefore, tasking the Navy with that function made sense. Limited communications and poor information distribution capabilities further complicated the command and control of amphibious operations. Amphibious operations require unity of effort and strong battlefield situational awareness to be successful. Unity of command through a naval commander was the best means of obtaining the unity of effort.

What is different today? The modern battlefield is not easily divided into discrete blocks of three-dimensional space. The authority to coordinate and sequence operations and to manage the battlespace is vested with the JFC. Normally, amphibious operations will not be the only means to introduce forces into the operating area. In order to generate tempo and disrupt the enemy scheme of maneuver, the JFC is more likely to employ amphibious forces in parallel with other forces across the maximum width and depth of battlespace. Amphibious operations could be the focus of main effort or in a supporting role as was the case in Operation *DESERT STORM*.

Another difference today is that the experience in the number fleets for fulfilling the role as the traditional CATF has significantly atrophied. The level of currency we maintain is as a result of operations conducted with the Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) attached to a three ship Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) during forward presence deployments. We do not conduct routine training at the number fleet level to train commanders to serve as a

CATF of a large-scale force or to exercise doctrine and refine standard operating procedures.

Not only training has changed, but also the manner in which we fight the force. Today we leverage smaller forces by the integration of more precision guided munitions. One of the objectives of operational maneuver from the sea is to generate enemy movement in response to amphibious based operations. Once that enemy maneuvers, fires are applied to attrite his forces. Because of the range and lethality of airpower, it has become the mainstay of the U.S. military's combat punch. In a joint environment, aviation fires in support of the amphibious operations will be tasked through the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) via the Air Tasking Order. As the current doctrine is written, CATF would be given OPCON of those aircraft while they operate in or support the Amphibious Objective Area (AOA). It is hard to envision a JFACC that would sign up that plan.

Another change in the environment is that, as a separate component, the U.S. Marine Corps has developed complementary capabilities to amphibious operations. The incorporation of forward basing and the ability to fly in forces to marry up with MPS gives the JFC additional options for employment of this force. Neither the U.S. Army nor the U.S. Marine Corps wants to be locked into a deployment option based solely on the restriction of command relationship doctrine.

The final change to the landscape is in the area of communication. Traditionally, the "long pole in the tent" that drove doctrine and command authority was the limits that communication capability imposed on the coordination and sequencing of the operation. Advances in information technology today provide more flexibility in how the force can be command and controlled. To find proof of the fact that complex operations can be

commanded and controlled with centralized planning and decentralized execution we need look no further than joint operations in Iraq, Kosovo, and Panama conducted under a JFC.

The traditional CATF/CLF command relationship must be changed to capture the benefits of fighting as a joint force and reduce the burden of training. Advancements in technology have erased many of the restrictions to operations that have driven the doctrinal requirements for amphibious operations. We must move forward with a new doctrine for command of amphibious operations. The sea is maneuver space like the land and the air. All component commanders should be able to utilize the flexibility and logistical sustainment advantages of operations from the sea. Requiring the component commander to always submit to an OPCON/TACON relationship as the price of utilizing this space denies the synergistic benefits of a truly integrated joint force. The question now is not should doctrine reflect a move to employing a support relationship for amphibious operations, but how aggressively can the JFC and the services move to incorporate this mindset across all the areas of the operational capability.

Let us now take a step back and ensure we have the same baseline on the definitions and procedures associated with the command relationships.

Defining Command Relationships

It is only when we have reached agreement on names and concepts that we can hope to progress with clearness and ease in the examination of the topic, and be assured of finding ourselves on the same platform with our reader.

Carl von Clausewitz

A support relationship is established when one force can aid, protect, complement, or sustain another force.¹⁸ The common superior commander establishes a support relationship.

For the purpose of this paper the JFC is the establishing authority. Contained within the Establishing Directive will be the priorities of the JFC and a delineation of the supporting forces and the supported force based on time, events or phase of the operation. The supported commander has the authority from the Establishing Directive to exercise general direction of the supporting effort.¹⁹ General direction is defined as " designation and prioritization of targets or objectives, timing and duration of supporting action, and other instructions necessary for coordination and efficiency."²⁰ The supporting commander " has responsibility to ascertain the needs of the supported force and take action to fulfill them within existing capabilities, consistent with priorities and requirements of other assigned tasks." ²¹

OPCON is "authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations and joint training necessary to accomplish missions assigned to the command." ²² OPCON permits the employment of forces within the command and the organization of commands and forces necessary to carry out assigned missions. Unless specifically authorized, OPCON does not normally provide authority in the following areas: logistics, matters of administration, discipline, internal organization, or unit training. ²³ TACON " provides sufficient authority for controlling and directing the application of force or tactical use of combat support assets."²⁴

Having "leveled the playing field" with regard to the definition of terms, it is now time to look at the advantages of the command relationships and how they would be employed by the JFC.

Advantages of New Command Relationships

Obviously, levels of command authority are provided in doctrine to enable the flexibility necessary to accomplish a wide array of missions. Therefore, the structure of command must complement the force and not impose restrictions on that force's ability to execute. A breakdown of command relationships by tasking limits associated with each command relationship is presented in table 1.²⁵ The complex nature of military operations requires that in execution, decentralization of command is optimal. Just by visual inspection, the degree of control associated with the OPCON/TACON command relationship is evident. Additionally, the overhead in training, liaison teams and additional coordination require that the rationale for selection of an OPCON command relationship be mandated by the military necessity.

Table I

Comparison of Command Authority

	Support	OPCON	TACON
<u>Organizational Authority</u>		X	X
<u>Assign Tasks</u>		X	X
<u>Control of designated forces</u>		X	X
<u>Give direction on priorities, timing, effects</u>	X	X	X
<u>Protect, sustain, Aid, complement</u>	X	X	X

Table 1
Comparison of Command Authority

	Support	OPCON	TACON
Organizational authority		X	X
Assign tasks		X	X
Control of designated forces		X	X
Give direction on priorities, timing; <u>effects</u>	X	X	X
Protect, sustain, Aid, complement	X	X	X

Presented in table 2 is a generic support relationship for amphibious operations.²⁶ The JFC will specify, via the establishing authority, the detailed breakdown by phase of the supporting/supported relationships required by the mission and threat presented. A study of the table demonstrates the complementary nature of a support relationship. The naval and land components can be integrated by tasks and phase to leverage the strengths of each component to the benefit of both.

Let us take a look at a couple of examples from the table to demonstrate the benefits. An assault requires the rapid build-up of combat power from zero against a hostile or potentially

Upon commencement of the assault the supported commander becomes the CLF who now can coordinate his fires and sequence forces.

A withdrawal is conducted to redeploy the force as a result of pressure from the enemy. During the withdrawal from the shore, the CLF is the supported commander with the ability to coordinate fires and movement. When the force has withdrawn the supported commander would become the CATF for movement within or to a new objective area.

The advantages of a support relationship to the JFC is that complementary forces can be attached with more transparency and less overhead in liaison/staff personnel and training requirements. In broader terms, a support relationship gives the JFC blocks of capability that can be seamlessly stacked to address an emerging threat or satisfy a mission requirement. As the requirement diminishes, the blocks of capability can be removed and applied to another task.

An advantage derived from the assignment of a JFC is the capability invested in the position to orchestrate and manage the battlespace. The JFC who utilizes a support relationship maintains the ability to sequence and coordinate the battlefield and maintain tempo.

The significant advantage to subordinate commanders is that the Establishing Directive provides a detailed breakdown of the priorities and assists the commander in self synchronizing. The subordinate commander knows his unit's capabilities and is in the best position to determine how to employ his force in either the supporting or supported role.

Under a support relationship, the CATF and CLF both have the authority to begin general direction of supporting units for operations and events which occur during phases they have

been designated the supported commander by the JFC. Coordination of aviation and fires is more coordinated and responsive as supported commanders have the authority to structure their plans and approve control procedures and targets throughout the process. Other supporting commands, such as U.S. Air Forces units assigned to support amphibious operations, can engage early in the coordination and the integration process of naval air assets for future phases.

A counter argument to the value of the support relationship is that the supported commander must rely on the supporting commanders to produce on time and to the level of required support. Drawing back on the Sea II Seminar War Game. Implicit in this doctrine is trust that fellow commanders will put aside interservice and intraservice rivalries and remain focused on the mission. Additionally, the JFC maintains oversight during a support relationship and can address gaps or shortfall with amendments to the Establishing Directive or by direct intervention as warranted.

Now that the consensus position has been forwarded to the Joint Staff for approval,²⁷ how do we ensure that we get fleet buy-in?

Implementing Change

*Basic fact remains that command relationships in such operations are not governed entirely by doctrine; they are likely never to be solely a function of the imperatives of the military situation; and they will inevitably reflect interservice rivalries, intraservice rivalries, and strong personalities. Like many problems of organization, these are probably enduring and structural matters that defy permanent solution. Doctrine goes a long way toward resolving them, but in the end - in actual practice- it provides only a foundation for the informal processes of accommodation and adjustment that structure command relationships.*²⁸

Joint Publication 1-02 states: “doctrine is authoritative, but requires judgement in

application.¹²⁹ This caveat acknowledges that wagers in military absolutes are a fool's gamble.

It is impossible to establish doctrine that applies to all situations. Military operations cannot be defined by a series of forcing functions that can be precisely solved. However, the complexity of military operations mandate that as new technology and capabilities are integrated into the force, an accommodation and adjustment in doctrine must be made.

Changing the array of command options associated with amphibious operations is justified by the joint manner in which forces are employed. To extinguish the glowing embers on this issue requires educating the force to the advantages and challenges associated with each command relationship. The service schoolhouses must be the first step. Additionally, more emphasis to training and conducting amphibious exercises, under a support relationship, will establish confidence and result in the meshing of the informal process of accommodation and newly written doctrine.

Summary

Technology and capability are but means to achieve ends. Those ends being to accomplish the objectives that the National Command Authority directs. Another enabler to accomplish those ends is the command relationship that forces operate and are employed under. The bottom line is that command relationships matter. The decision on what is the appropriate command organization must be driven by the construct of an equation whose sum of flexibility and agility is the greatest. Amphibious operations are normally part of a joint environment. The accepted command doctrine must account for that joint nature. The land component of an amphibious task force could be a USMC or an U. S. Army unit. The

command options available must not lock out these forces from a seamless integration into the force mix. Additionally, the command relationships must permit the rapid assimilation of other service components without the requirement for excessive training or the need for ad hoc integration documentation and coordination.

Providing the JFC with an array of command authority options is the right approach. The traditional CATF/CLF command relationship must undergo a transformation to acknowledge the joint environment and to embrace the advances in mobility and information distribution capabilities. The support relationship provides both the subordinate commanders and the JFC an efficient means to integrate all the battlefield resources and to properly coordinate and sequence activities to ensure mission success. Obviously, the wide range of military missions, combination of forces and the threat will dictate to the JFC, which command relationship to adopt. The warfighters in the sea services and the other components should embrace this change and educate themselves and their subordinates to this new doctrine.

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- ¹ Joint Pub 3-02. Joint Doctrine For Amphibious Operations. Washington DC: Department of Defense, 8 October 1992, p2.
- ² Commandant of the Marine Corps ALMAR 016/00. "Naval Command Relations". Washington, DC: 102248Z MAR 00.
- ³ Commandant of the Marine Corps ALMAR 006/01. "Naval Command Relations". Washington, DC: 231100Z FEB 01.
- ⁴ Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAAV) along with the LCAC and MV-22 add mobility to Operational Maneuver from the Sea.
- ⁵ Marine Corps Combat Development Command. "JP 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations Brief". Quantico, VA: 21 March 2001, slide 35.
- ⁶ Joint Pub 0-2. Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). Washington, DC: U S Government Printing Office, 24 February 1995, p III-9.
- ⁷ Marine Corps Combat Development Command. "JP 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations Brief." Quantico, VA: 21 March 2001, slide 35.
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- ⁹ Haselden, Carl E "Naval Consensus on Amphibious Command Relationships," Marine Corps Gazette. Quantico, VA: April 2001, p 42.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command and the Commander, Navy Warfare Development Command coordinated and hosted. CINCPACFLT, CINCLANTFLT, Commander in Chief, US Navy Forces Europe, Commander Marine Corps Forces, Pacific; Commander Marine Corps Forces, Atlantic provided commanders and staffs for the war game.
- ¹² Commandant of the Marine Corps ALMAR 006/01. "Naval Command Relations". Washington, DC: 231100Z FEB 01.
- ¹³ Haselden. Carl E. " Naval Consensus on Amphibious Command Relationships", Marine Corps Gazette Quantico, VA: April 2001, p 43.
- ¹⁴ Joint Pub 3-02. Joint Doctrine For Amphibious Operations. Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 8 October 1992. p II-9.
- ¹⁵ Naval War College. "Navy and Marine Corps Consensus Position on Amphibious Command Relationships Brief" Newport RI: 26 January 2001, slide 5.
- ¹⁶ Commandant of the Marine Corps ALMAR 016/00. "Naval Command Relations". Washington, DC 102248Z MAR 00.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Joint Pub 0-2. Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 24 February 1995, p III-10.

¹⁹ Ibid., p III-11.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p III-8.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., III- 10.

²⁵ Marine Corps Combat Development Command. "JP 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations Brief". Quantico. VA: 21 March 2001, slide 23.

²⁶ Ibid, slide 21.

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²⁸ Ibid., slide 34.

²⁹ Haselden, Carl E. "Naval Consensus on Amphibious Command Relationships", Marine Corps Gazette. Quantico, VA: April 2001, p 44.